

Personality Construct Among Patients With Substance Use Disorder: An Explanatory Study In Pakistan

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Objective: Many researches defined the critical predictors and significant risk factors associated with various substance use behaviors, revealing the personality traits as important determinants. Thus, the present study aimed to explore the personality constructs of individuals with a history of substance use disorder in Pakistan.

Method: The Qualitative Study was conducted through purposive sampling by selecting the professionals (psychiatrists=9, clinical psychologists=4, patients with SUD = 5) with having a minimum of 5 years to a maximum of 29 years of experience working with substance use disorder patients and participants with the history of at least three years of diagnosis. A total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine (N=13) mental health professionals and five (N=05) patients with substance use disorder. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by independent researchers. The transcripts were analyzed using a systematic approach that incorporates inductive thematic analysis.

Results: The themes that emerged after analyses were combined under the main three headings: Social, Cultural and Psychological/individual factors. The main results indicated that authoritative parenting style, family lifestyles, pleasure-seeking, enhanced energy, dependent personality traits, emotional instability and conflicting interpersonal relationship lead to substance use which can be addressed through early intervention.

Keywords: Personality traits, Personality constructs, substance use disorder, drugs

Author's Contribution.

Dr. Mirrat developed the initial idea. Maham Rasheed mainly conducted the data collection and research. Then Maham & Quratulain performed the literature search, wrote both preregistrations, and analyzed the data under the supervision of Dr. Mirrat. Maham Rasheed drafted the manuscript.

Masooma and Dr. Mirrat provided critical revisions. All authors contributed equally to this work.

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Introduction

Adolescents between 10 and 24 years demand high sensitivity towards social stimulus and proper social interaction [1]. During this period of emotional instability, individuals are keen to adopt those behaviors which lead them towards various health risks such as substance use disorders [2]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it has been indicated that worldwide, more than a quarter of individuals aged 15 to 19 years are currently suffering from SUD, which costs approximately 155 billion (WHO, 2021) [3]. The World Bank showed that the prevalence of addiction is higher in Low Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) and more than 80 percent of addiction-related deaths have been expected by 2030 in LMICs [4]. Furthermore, the problem of SUD is even more sensitive in Pakistan. Different studies showed that approximately 6.7 million people are regular users of substances such as heroin, opium and others including misuse of prescribed medication [5].

A drug is a substance that becomes the cause of changes in biological functioning as the medicines are comprised of chemicals that interact with the brain and cause physiological changes [6]. In ancient times, herbs and plants were used as a medication for any disease. According to [7] continuing substance usage diminishes health and well-being. Research showed that cultural-specific factors such as family pressure, lack of support, conflicting environment, financial instability and peer pressure significantly impact adapting behavior as individuals consider substances the only coping strategy to deal with the problems [8]. However, enjoyment and curiosity in some countries also significantly influence adolescent substance use [9].

Sociocultural Theory:

According to sociocultural theory, environmental and social pressures play a role in developing drug abusive personalities [10]—various social forces such as unemployment, single-parent families and poverty foster the development of drug abuse. The attitudes of society, (i.e., societal attitudes) family and peers towards drugs play a role in the use of drugs. Also, the peer clusters significantly impact individuals' attitudes toward drug use [11].

The objective of the Study:

In recent years, the usage of drugs (alcohol, hash & heroin) has become very common in Pakistan because of their ease of availability [12]. The substance-related problems are increasing alarmingly in Pakistan. Different studies highlight other aspects of substance use. Still, the present study aims to explore the personality make-up of individuals with a history of substance use disorder in Pakistan.

The novelty of the Study:

In Pakistan, different studies have been conducted to explore risk factors and management of substance use disorder. Still, there is a lack of studies on who can play a role before developing substance use disorder. This Study will support the clinicians in developing the management strategies plan at the prodromal level so the prevalence of SUD can be decreased.

Material and Methods:

The present study explored the personality make-up of individuals with a history of substance use disorder in Pakistan.

Research Design

The descriptive qualitative research design was used to explore the personality make-up of individuals with a history of substance use disorder in Pakistan.

Sampling Strategy & Sample

The Qualitative Study was conducted through purposive sampling by selecting the professionals across Pakistan (psychiatrists=9, clinical psychologists=4, patients with SUD = 5) having at least five years to a maximum of 29 years of experience working with a substance

use disorder patients and patients with the history of at least three years of diagnosis. A total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine (N=13) mental health professionals and five (N=05) patients with substance use disorder. The purposive sampling technique recruited the participants. The sample was recruited through semi-structured interviews after completing the written informed consent from concerned participants and the institute. The data gathered from the discussion was transcribed, translated, and analyzed to interpret the results.

Research Tools

The semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the participants who gave consent to participate in the Study. The interviews were conducted in the Native language, Urdu, and then transcribed into English. All the interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews were recorded on two recording devices to ensure backup in case one device was not working. The researcher was accompanied by an assistant who took notes during the interviews. The duration of an interview ranged from 30 minutes to 45 minutes on average. The researcher and respondents asked open-ended questions and were encouraged to give detailed responses.

Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected through interviews. This qualitative design is appropriate for exploring drug abuse individuals [13], [14]. All the interviews were transcribed and translated into English. The cracked and original transcription data files were shared with the language expert to ensure the quality of translation and to grasp the exact meanings the participants communicated.

The inductive thematic analysis approach was used for the data analysis, aimes to categorize a set of central themes that captured participants' diverse views and feelings. The thematic analysis was used to summarize the key features of large data sets. This approach directs researchers to implement a well-structured system while dealing with the data which eventually produces a clear and organized final report [15].

The conceptual themes were extracted from the highlighted points in the next stage. The coding/highlighting themes were carried out for all the interviews. The final step grouped similar articles under the main or significant categories. Inter-coder reliability improved when the coders used the analysis code book independently and a discussion was held between the coders and experts to resolve disparities in coding. In the end, a final file was prepared in which categories and themes were constructed.

Data Trustworthiness

The member checking/external audit of themes was conducted by assigning an external auditor who reviewed the data and confirmed his agreement with the extracted articles. Another validity technique of qualitative research was known as detailed thick descriptions. According to detailed thick descriptions, the participant's responses were presented in detail, all minor details were reported and in-depth analysis was conducted.

Ethical Consideration

The ethical board of research approval was obtained and permission was granted to collect data from the concerned drug abuse treatment centers. The participants were recruited and individual/participants were given permission. The participants were explained their right to withdraw from the Study if they were not willing to continue or if they were not comfortable. They were also told to consult the free counseling service after the interview if the interview has caused discomfort which they want to overcome with the help of a professional psychologist.

Result and discussion Result: The present study aimed to explore the personality make-up of individuals with a history of substance use disorder in Pakistan. The interviews were gathered verbatim and then themes were generated using thematic analysis.

Table 1 The table shows the significant themes merged from the analysis of interviews

Major Themes	Subordinate themes	Sub-themes
Social Factors	Role of social factors in the development of Personality construct	Drive for autonomy, perceived social isolation and perceived adequacy in others, impulsive behavior, negative reinforcement,
Cultural Factors	Cultural factors associated with the development of Personality construct	Dependent traits, risky behaviors, aggression, interpersonally dependency, avoidance, suppression of emotions
Psychological Factors	Psychological factors associated with the development of personality construct	Low self-esteem, implicative dilemmas, self-blaming, lack of coping strategies, minimal tolerance level, moody, worrying, nervous, calm

Description of themes

Theme 1: Social factors

In this theme, our primary purpose is to explore those social factors that can be analyzed in an individual that can lead to any substance use later in life. This personality constructs can be observed in the early stages while performing in society. These are individuals drive for autonomy, perceived social isolation and adequacy in others, impulsive behavior and negative reinforcement from their different life experiences.

During the interview, a client reported that

“Substance use helps him enjoy the peak of autonomy drive in his fantasies.”

Different professionals focus on the individual wanting independence and freedom from the problems they are feeling due to a lack of coping strategies. The pleasure they get from substance use is not immediately developed at early stages, they either want to gain autonomy in different incidents or might be observing others. As it is reported by one of the professionals, according to my clinical observation;

“Due to introvert personality trait, they cannot ask or demand or even seek the independency so they choose the way which will be easy for them. We can say shortcut.”

According to substance use disorder professionals, many social factors can be identified early in an individual's personality when interacting in social perspective with others and can be risk factors.

On the other hand, the communication gap remains one of the principals as parents want adolescents to follow their instructions rather than explore their children's perspectives. The lack of communication can be analyzed in the introvert or neurotic personality. They tends to be perceived as alone while giving their point of view. As they reported;

“Our perspective can be considered neither at home nor not in society.”

Furthermore, these are the personality changes that would be developed in the series of incidents as triggers shape these social factors in the personality constructs. As “I am worthless and consider remaining in my word of power and enjoyment instead of being criticized by others.”

Professionals asked whether this personality construct is the type of revenge feelings for themselves and society. As they reported;

“It’s like behavior, i.e., breaking the rules and norms.”

Family instability also becomes a risk factor when an individual does not receive financial support. The youth in Pakistan is heavily influenced by social media and tries to maintain a social status among their peers. The demands of society are ever increasing which are to be fulfilled to sustain the social level. Youth who cannot fulfill them might use the substance to overcome their complexities. As one of the young clients reported;

“Outside, even in educational institutes, you only survive when you maintain your standards; otherwise, being bullied.”

Furthermore, this can be impacted as a negative reinforcement to the individual. Most families can fulfill their children's demands once or twice and then not meet the rest of the perspectives, reinforcing them negatively.

Theme 2: Cultural factors

It has been indicated, in Pakistan, some dilemmas can be directed implicated on males or forcefully asked to suppress their emotions; as reported

“Male is forced by society not to express emotions.”

Emotional catharsis is the primary element for the survival of any human being. It has been observed that a male’s dynamic symbol would be considered a “lack of strength.” The emotional outburst often can be observed in the personalities of men.

Conduct behaviors, for example involve in risky behaviors can be a personality construct that can predict future use of substance use. Some individuals use them because of peer pressure for the benefit of addiction substances; this is because most teenagers adopt this behavior from the influence of their friends or to maintain their socialization. It is a common practice in Pakistan called “influence of peer pressure,” in which they manifest friend's patterns.

This allows them to fit in their friend’s circle and save them from social isolation. As reported;

“There is nothing I cannot do when I get a challenge from my friends. The use of heroin is one of these challenges.”

Furthermore, according to different professionals, these challenging behaviors can be easily observed in the individual at a very early stage because it indicates a dependent personality, which needs to be acknowledged for survival in society. Dependent personality traits can be observed in the below mentioned some verbatim;

“My friend asked me to try drugs when I was staying at his place. He was not addicted but just for fun, wanted to try with me. We both become addicted later on”.

Also, the participant shared his story as follows

“I never wanted to try drugs but then my friends started bullying me by calling me weed and to comply with their demand. I gave it a try but was not addicted. Often in my friend’s company, I started to have a craving for drugs and this is how I started”.

Another significant explanation that participants provided was about enhanced energy which results in better output in their chores. Thus, the sub-theme of enhanced energy was extracted from the data.

One participant explained this theme in these words:

“Taking a little doze of drug helps me focus more on my work and I was taking an adequate amount to enhance my focus and productivity. But my family did not understand this and created problems for me and resultantly I started taking it in bigger doses. If you take in a certain amount, I still believe it works magic for increasing energy and focuses on looking like my friends”.

Another participant explained that:

“If I am tired and work with better energy, why should I quit using this substance? I think I can stop using it whenever I want, but most of the time, especially when I have to do some important work and make important decisions. I need more energy; I get this energy by using the drug”.

Theme 3: Psychological factors

The results concluded that some personality traits could be observed at an early stage: individuals having low self-esteem, implicative dilemmas, self-blaming and lack of coping strategies, minimal tolerance level, moody, worrying, nervous and very calm. These traits could lead to the behavior of substance use as they reported positive outcomes of substances such as drugs allowed them to be more enthusiastic, feel relaxed use as a coping strategy to forget about the present stress and problems, to get rid of depressive feelings, determination of energy and also to get stimulation for them. Analyze the relationship between the psychological factors and the use of substances can be determined from the immediate response of one participant was;

“I used to relax and forget about problems, which helped me be less stressed.”

According to the professionals, rude behaviors in the youth indicate a lack of tolerance which is the predictor of substance use.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the personality make-up of individuals with a history of substance use disorder in Pakistan. In the present study, different personality traits were observed early in adolescence which is considered a risk factor in developing substance use disorder [16]. Various researches showed that personality traits and the usage of other substances had a great relationship. Lower levels of conscientiousness and neuroticism have been associated with using different substances such as tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy (XTC), sedatives and heroin [17]. Other studies have also indicated it while reporting minor to medium size effects [18].

It has been shown that significant life satisfaction has been analyzed while using different substances, such as alcohol consumption [19], [20]. In our study, it has been indicated that life satisfaction is at risk individuals would relate with the approval of society acceptance they involve in the risky behavior to get acceptance. It can be an early warning sign toward substance use.

The current study participants stated family is an essential and vital factor for drug abuse. Among all the family factors, few were expected, such as lack of warmth and emotional expression, absence of a safe and friendly environment at home, weak attachment between children and the parents, family members abusing drugs. The parents' lack of monitoring and monitoring of children were stated amid the factors determined from the interviews. Family relationships were declared to be more vital than the structure of the family [21]. There are various ways in which family can play a role in developing drug abuse. For instance, the absence of a friendly and amiable home environment would raise the chances of troublesome and unhealthy behavior in children [22], [23].

It has been indicated that individuals with high neuroticism traits were more likely to consume more drugs than those with low conscientiousness [24]. The findings of the present study were reflected in the self-esteem of individuals as those who lack self-esteem were more likely to report or be involved in substance use disorder.

Conclusion

It can be seen that themes ranging from personality factors, including higher incidence of depressive and mood shifts, self-esteem to social factors are considered significant features reflected by the participants. The findings also highlight the need to address family issues and

interpersonal conflicts by improving communication skills. Substance use to have been proposed as an aspirant mechanism for personality changes that may be mediated via biological pathways [25], [26] as well as behavioral [27], [28] or social mechanisms [29]. Although identification of personality constructs in the perspective of Pakistan culture would be helpful to devise the management plan for early warning signs to decrease the ratio of substance use disorder.

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